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(FOURTH EDITION.)

THE

WORSHIP OF GOD.

A SERMON.

BY

OSWALD JOHN SIMON,

OF BALLIOL COLLEGE, OXFORD.

14th October, 1880—5641.

בֹּאוּ נִשְׁתַּחֲוֶה וְנִכְרָעָה נִבְרְכָה לִפְנֵי יְהוָה עֹשֵׂנִי׃

"O, come, let us worship, and bow down: let us kneel before the Lord our Maker."—*Psalm* 95, *verse* 6.

LONDON:
SIMPKIN, MARSHALL & CO.

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DEDICATION.

To JOHN SIMON, SERJEANT-AT-LAW, M.P., and to RACHEL, his wife,

With the deepest sentiments of love and filial devotion, I dedicate my first series of Sermons, because they are the first-fruits of the aspirations I inherit from my parents. My position towards my father is like that described by Solomon: "It was in the heart of David my father to build a house to the LORD GOD, but the LORD said to him: It is well that it is in thy heart, though thou shalt not build it; but thy son, he shall build it." I am to my mother as Samuel was to Hannah, for she, too, "prayed for a son who might be lent to the LORD all his days." I fervently pray that all their children and grand children may be the source of comfort and happiness to them for the remainder of their lives, and be worthy inheritors of the treasures of soul and intellect which they bequeathe.

O. J. S.

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PREFACE.

In presenting Jews, Christians, and others, with this Sermon it may be well to tell them that it is one of a group of four, about the nature of God and the object of Religion, which are connected with several others. Some of them are intended for the Pulpit, but a portion of them for publication in this way. I have often thought that Sermons or Essays, which treat of the inmost experiences of a spiritual life, are better read than spoken. It is with this view I have prepared some Sermons for private perusal. Another reason why I do so is because my optical vision is so defective that, as a general rule, I have to resort to the practice of extempore speaking, and, although I have

dictated this and other writings to an amanuensis, I should feel some strain in reading them.

If this, or any words of mine, bring some comfort or assistance to no more than a single soul I shall have, in that fact, a very high source of consolation for the many trials and difficulties Almighty Providence has decreed for me ere I could enter that career on which the hopes and prayers of my entire life, from my earliest childhood, have been centred.

OSWALD JOHN SIMON.

HARVILLE, WYE, KENT.

4th November, 1880.

THE WORSHIP OF GOD.

THE worship of GOD is the highest act of which the human mind is capable. It is at once the end and the means of religion; it is a process of the soul in which faith, love, and resignation are particularly called into play. To worship GOD is to resolve our higher nature into its original element—that is to say, it is to realise the kinship between that nature and our Maker; it is to enter into the inmost sanctuary of human virtue and divine love. Think, my friends, what it is to enter into direct converse with Almighty GOD! To think rightly about this we must first exercise all our spiritual understanding in order to know, in some degree, what

God is whom we endeavour to approach. Then, let us think of the perfection of power, the perfection of knowledge, the perfection of truth, the perfection of wisdom, the perfection of love, and the perfection of peace. By these thoughts we can see God in those attributes of His with which we are familiar. Now, in the act of worship, we, on our side, are frail, prone to error, ignorant, and full of vanity, though also possessing virtuous and noble aspirations, and good impulses. In our complete nature we are composed of atoms of everything that constitutes us, and we are an atom as a whole; whilst, on the other side, is the living God, who is all that has been described of Him, in infinite proportions, and infinitely more than our comprehension can embrace. We, individually, propose to meet Him in our worship, to speak to Him, to utter our wants and woes, our hopes and fears; and, also, to offer Him our homage as the Author of our being and this Universe, and our thanks for His particular mercies to us. Now, there are here, prayer, homage, and gratitude, to be

conveyed by men, women, and children, to the God of the spirits of all flesh—to be conveyed by direct intercourse, without any sort of mediation. This is the "Holy of Holies" in the Jewish religion. Our prophets, our rabbis, and our other great men, have prescribed every form of prayer to show Israelites and Gentiles how they should worship and what should constitute their devotions. Imbued with such teachings the duty of the Israelite is facilitated in cultivating from the earliest age and to the highest degree his native faculty of worship.

The power of praying to God—to use a household phrase—like other unseen powers, is natural and fruitful. It is born with us; we inherit it, not only as Israelites, but as men. It is nurtured by the mother, if she be a true Jewess, and at a very early age it is for the child to increase this power by his own self-culture. I am not one of those who would encourage the idea of resigning the proscribed liturgy and substituting for it extempore prayers, or natural thoughts, for three reasons: first, a liturgy

educates the public mind, and, in a sense, levels the congregation; secondly, it is a discipline to thought, which often wanders, and frequently into channels not calculated to flow towards the highest spiritual good; and, thirdly, it is the vehicle for transmitting, from generation to generation, the history of the spiritual life of Israel. On the other hand I am equally opposed to a practice which was common in periods of Jewish history not very distant, and which is not yet altogether extinct—viz., regarding the liturgy as the complete exponent to God of individual worship, and therefore rarely or never suffering the individual soul to make his own utterances even in his private chamber. There are many good Israelites who never omit, at the stated times, to recite the prayer-book portions of devotions. These portions are so lengthy that to read them consumes an amount of time which a busy man or schoolboy cannot afford to extend, and the result is that they are left literally no time for their own personal devotions; and such people, from long custom, almost obliterate the fact that real worship means a soul

talking itself—its own language, its own thoughts—to its Creator.

It is of supreme moment to the preservation of the spirit of our religion that our young should be taught to appreciate and to practise real worship.

The scheme of life, which is such a vexed question, is, according to Judaism, to develope human life after the model of the Divine, in whose image man was created. To reduce this, to the comprehension and realization of every soul, it must be expressed thus: in order to live near to God we must detach ourselves from mammon and wean our affections from the snares of the world and the flesh; therefore it is indispensable that we should endeavour, with every power we possess, to suppress the animal side of our nature, that the higher life—the intellectual and spiritual—shall enjoy unfettered growth. Everybody is aware of the frailty and weakness of human nature even in the best men and women, and how, in a moment, thoughts, which were engaged in pure aspirations and devout sentiments, are usurped by opposite

feelings—how, by the influence of surrounding and temporary conditions, the whole man seems to change—this is what we mean when we say of an acquaintance "he was very disagreeable in his manner;" or, of another, "he treated me very kindly." Nothing, then, but intensely active watchfulness can preserve those charms and graces of life which all people appreciate in one another, and which are nothing but the reflex of inward spiritual discipline. It is vain to attempt to guard against evil habits or thoughts unless one is fully conscious that they are evil, and that one is guilty of them. Now, a very high office of worship is the act of secretly but unreservedly confessing, at those times of communion with God, every act or thought which was wrong, and, indeed, to analize the state of our moral character, to search our motives, and to ask forgiveness from our heavenly Father, who is merciful; and to seek from Him renewal of His Divine Grace, that we may not have to confess the same sin twice. It is a poor thing to say once a year, or even every day, "Pardon us, O God, for

we have sinned," and to use vain and exaggerated language about the sins we fancy we have committed, or we think it our duty to fancy. All this is very common, but it is a very imperfect way of making progress! Be satisfied if you confess one fault, but be perfectly sure what that is! Accuracy of thought and expression are insisted upon in secular matters most wisely; but, unfortunately, they seldom are in this respect. Now, this sort of confession is essential to a pure conscience. Whether we confess a particular fault or not that fault is well known to God, and has probably been observed by our neighbours; but Religion demands the confession of it as a guarantee that the person at fault shall know that he is at fault, in order to correct it. This is the strongest possible reason why we should habituate ourselves to commune with God, and that, as frequently as possible, never less than twice a day. King David worshipped God seven times a day: and we read in the Book of Daniel, "And his windows being open in his chamber toward Jerusalem, he kneeled upon his knees three times a day, and

prayed and gave thanks before his GOD."

To worship GOD is to admire His attributes, and to seek out those of them which it is possible for us in some measure to assimilate. For this purpose there must be perfect genuineness in our worship, and no sort of secret attempt or desire to avoid uttering what is unpleasant because adverse to our own conduct. The simple doctrine taught by the Jewish Religion about Atonement is as clear and simple as it is lovely and merciful: "I will blot out thy transgressions for mine own sake:" "If, with all your hearts, ye truly seek me, ye shall ever surely find me, thus saith our GOD." And, "If ye confess your sins, though they be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow." Hence this act of confessing promotes unsullied purity, and in that state only can we perfectly appreciate the glory of GOD, and adore Him.

Communion, of any sort, cannot be one-sided, especially when it takes place between a human being and the Deity, whose relative position is analogous to that of parent and child. In re-

sponse to our worship there issues from the Most High, peace, love, intelligence, clearness of thought, strength of mind, power of will, charity, more faith, and more hope. Is it a small thing to desire the possession of such virtues, knowing that they are attainable? And to seek to be in such condition of nearness to all that is good and great? It is scarcely possible to over-estimate the marvellous and apparently superhuman effect which a LIFE of perfect worship, that is to say, of communion with GOD, exhibits. Some of us have met with persons who lead a life such as this, and when we come to know them intimately we are struck with qualities which might seem to belong only to a divine being, points of character which indicate themselves in every transaction and in every relation of life. They spring from some cause, certainly independent of external influences and secular education. We observe a person who is comparatively uneducated, but who possesses soundness of judgment which some of the most learned lack, a largeness of heart, a keen perception, a just mind, and sympathy, powers which inspire con-

fidence, and make one feel a wish to unbosom oneself to him—a person who can give the best advice in vicissitude, who is gentle, tender, forbearing, utterly unselfish, who, in doing good, makes the object of his kindness feel that the act is no strain, but a pleasure, done quietly and humbly. The great characters of the Bible and of history were people of this description. And in our own day, thank God, such persons are to be found. Take the example of a very good woman: what extraordinary self-negation is there, and a living for others, love sunk in other love than that of self, entirely free from every gross passion and thought. What is the reason of this? From a variety of causes it happens in most cases that women more fully practise the kind of worship that is needful than is the case with men.

Let us conclude! I have endeavoured to describe the nature of worship in its several acts, and to point to those high ends to which all worship should tend. We have dealt with that element of worship called Confession, which purifies our inner life. Then there is the act of homage,

which is a recognition of divine life and sovereignty, and an unqualified surrender to that Power. Gratitude speaks thanksgiving and praise, and thereby leads the mind to a calm and increasing conception of the Deity. It brings us to estimate such a passage in Isaiah as this:—"I am He, the Holy and Lofty One, who inhabiteth eternity, and who dwelleth in the heights, but with him also that is of a humble and contrite spirit, to revive the spirit of the meek." You will put a value on these words of David: "They looked up unto Him, and became enlightened and their faces were not ashamed;" or, in the words of Isaiah in our communion with GOD we may say, "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on Thee, because he trusteth in Thee."

Obviously, the more we reflect about GOD, the more our minds become penetrated with those thoughts and feelings in connection with Him that point to a higher life in this world and demonstrate better paths of goodness. Prayer is usually understood as the asking for our desires, which is

in itself an act of submission. It is a dignifying homage which bends before an ideal TRUTH, and which bows down to the nobility of the highest love—I mean the LOVE of GOD. Mothers in Israel! teach your little ones to pray first of all for faith, and afterwards, for more faith. The highest spiritual nature will seek in prayer only the highest spiritual gifts; and to him, the efficacy of prayer will be as true and as real as his own existence. The less cultured soul will seek in prayer material things; and to him the efficacy of prayer will be a dubious problem.

Oh, hallowed perfect GOD! teach us to pray! Give us a heart to know and a mind to comprehend THEE as far as Thy will permits us to learn. Grant, O LORD GOD of our fathers! complete harmony between our wills and Thine! May we desire no other thing than that which Thou orderest! Oh! bring us to Thine everlasting kingdom, and may we taste of its profuse sweetness on this earth in our flesh! Send out Thy light and Thy truth, and knit for ever every Hebrew and Gentile soul to Thy glorious SELF. Oh, Thou

from whom no secrets are hid! try us and search our hearts, and see if there be any wicked way in us, and lead us in the way everlasting; for it is the way of truth and love only which are everlasting; and all the corrupt ways of men are perishable and only mortal. Preserve to us the grand ancient FAITH which Thou didst reveal to our fathers—progenitors of our families, and which has borne the test of more than four thousand years to prove its vitality, and to show that we ISRAEL are Thy WITNESSES! Shine forth in the excellency of Thy supreme power, and make every human being know that he is bound to worship Thee; that unto Thee every knee shall bend, and every tongue swear. And Thou shalt be acknowledged as the ONLY LORD, and Thy name recognised as the only ONE! Be Thou for ever glorified amidst the praises of all Israel, who shall be united and gathered together as one man, the SERVANT of the LORD, to whom His Arm was revealed, and who believed His report. *Amen.*

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